Code-switching and Empowerment in the Macaronic Irish Lyric

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Commençant avec la trouvaille de Jonsson (2005) que l'aiguillage d'une langue à l'autre (code-switching) ne nécessairement favorise pas la langue la plus forte socialemente, cette étude examine des chansons poly-macaroniques, ou aiguillantes entre plusieurs langues. Dans telles chansons l'une des langues est habituellement dominante, l'autre socialement subordonnée, et la troisième en quelque cas formalisée ou fixée, associée avec des codes rituels, politiques ou sacrés que surpassent les bords sociales et etniques. Cette espèce de chanson est très favorisée parmi les chansons nationalistes irlandaises, et cette étude suggère que leur fréquence est dialectique, sautante plus de la politique culturelle que d'un besoin à être compris.

Keywords: macaronic, Irish rebel song, code-switching, empowerment

1 Code-switching and the macaronic song

Macaronic songs, a term used to designate lyrics performed in two or more languages, are a well-established feature of the oral literature of Ireland. In this paper I consider a special development of the macaronic song in Ireland, what I have called the *poly-macaronic lyric*, where more languages than two are featured. Each of these additional languages, in this case Latin and French, has a specific cultural function in an Irish context, and I suggest that they act interrogatively, further undermining the aspiration of the occupying power to establish English as Ireland's sole voice. As Brian Friel's play *Translations*, first staged in 1980, shows, the history of the Irish language itself has been one of silenced voices, and the struggle for nationhood always linked closely with language, summed up in the Irish saying *gan teanga gan tír* "no language, no land" (Coughlan 2001: 216). In particular, I show how Irish rebel songs use the dialectical possibilities of the poly-macaronic lyric to fracture authoritative codes. In this way, code-switching becomes an instrument of empowerment.

Even when anonymous, most macaronic songs are the work of bilingual local versifiers. They were often printed as broadsides or in song books, and were therefore also a part

of the literary system. For example, "Finnegan's Wake," the song from which James Joyce took his title, is a comic macaronic narrative that was available on many printed sheets sold on the Dublin streets in the nineteenth century:

(1)   Miss Biddy O"Brien began to cry,
        "Such a neat clean corpse did you ever see,
        Arrah Tim avourneen [my love, Tim, my dear], why did you die?"
        Ah, hould your gab [shut up]," said Paddy McGee. (O Lochlainn 1978a: 180. Italics added)

Dyson's criterion for bilingual speakers (1993: 178–179) is that they should have perfect control over two or more linguistic systems and manage to keep them separate from each other. However, this does not apply to the subjects of this paper, the Irish during the colonial period. They were forced to speak in English because of prohibitions on the use of their mother tongue. English was taught in schools, while Irish was learnt at home. The same constraint was naturally extended to the composers and performers of these songs, as in the comments of this author in about 1830:

(2)   I composed [some verses against a bailiff] in Irish, but of course I was then forced to find out English words. My sorrow on it for English, for the thoughts don't look the same in it at all at all; and the music (he probably meant rhythm) instead of moving with fine free strides, seems as if it was a horse striving to get on, with his two forelegs spancelled [hobbled]. (Zimmermann 2002: 20.)

Donal O"Sullivan confirms this in his account of an interim version of the Napoleonic song "The Bonny Bunch of Roses", from the same period, which he sees as being derived from an Irish original (Bunting 1937: 41–42). The same applies to the equally well-known "Roisin Dubh" or "Dark Rosaleen" (Ó Tuama 1981: 308–311).

In the same way as the songwriters, many singers could perform songs in both Irish and English, or combine the two in the process known as code-switching. Myers-Scotton (quoted in Wardhaugh 1997: 110) used a Matrix Frame Model to show that in such situations one language is dominant or matrix and the other subordinate and embedded. It is the former that determines what happens to words in the embedded language. In the Myers-Scotton model, one language is always privileged. The macaronic song would thus represent an unequal positioning between margin and centre, between the subaltern and the dominant.

However, two languages often exist in symbiosis, where bilingual speakers interchange languages in such a complex way that it becomes impossible to speak of a dominant or 'matrix' language any more. Auer (1998) introduced the term *code-mixing* for this situation, which is true of many parts of present-day California, a state which has a narrow Spanish-speaking majority. Using a term from postcolonialist studies of diasporas, Barker and Galasinski (2003: 159) call this "the hybridization that occurs from the mixing of difference and the production of the new."

This has important implications for the analysis of power relations in discourse, particularly in performance arts such as drama and vernacular song, the subject of the present paper. In her study of three Chicana (Spanish-American) plays by Cherrie Moraga, Jonsson (2005) showed that code-switching is not necessarily in favour of the hegemonic language. The more the subordinate language features in discourse, the more it demands to be heard. By making constant use of Spanish in her plays, Moraga puts the English-speaking audience at a disadvantage: the majority population becomes the Other and English is decentred. Jonsson shows how, in the language politics of the United States, "code-switching and code-mixing is a means to construct identity and to challenge power relations" (2005: 77). It is a powerful act of resistance.

As well as Gaelic idioms and pronunciation, many Irish words remain in the English versions, and Irish syntactical structures lie behind many of the most common features of the songs: their ornamented style (known as *sean-nós*), their internal rhymes: *Down a green boreen* [path] *came a sweet colleen* [girl] (Ó Boyle 1979: 21), and their use of assonance, or vowel-rhymes.

2 Codeswitching in the 'rebel song'

The use of Irish structures in English texts indexes identity, and is a practice that applies forcefully to an oral genre like the song. A song is always in dialogue: with itself, with the listener, with other texts and with empowered discourses. The macaronic form is therefore central to Irish political songs, so-called "rebel songs". In contrast to protest songs, which speak for the individual, rebel songs express group opposition to the status

quo. It is also necessary to distinguish between the patriotic and the rebel song. The patriotic song usually confines itself to celebrating the nation and its glories, like the sentimental "Shamrock Shore"[1] and "Dear Land of the West", which were widespread in the nineteenth century and, ironically, continue to be sung today, largely in the Irish diaspora. The rebel song may be similarly celebratory, but also identifies the enemy (the British, often described as "the Saxon" or simply "the tyrant") and supports struggle against it on all fronts. The songs are frequently very circumstantial, naming actual conflicts and the combatants involved.

A very high proportion of the rebel songs are macaronic. While statistical analysis of the features of individual songs has little relation to the total number of *performances*, it is significant that while Zimmermann (2002: 94) estimates that only about 10% of Irish songs are "rebel songs", they make up more than 40% of the macaronic songs published as broadsides in the nineteenth century.[2] It is my contention here that the features of Gaelic which are strongly found in the songs are not a sign of impoverishment but what Declan Kiberd describes as a "glamorous conspiratorial act" (1996: 616). Thus translation for a monolingual audience plays, or played, no part in the Irish macaronic song: the bilingual nature of the songs has more to do with cultural politics than with a desire to be understood.

Until the early twentieth century, the status of Irish was that of a language existing alongside, but not on equal terms with, the dominant colonial language, English. Many of those supporting independence, or at least Home Rule, for Ireland were Protestants, speaking English, and Nigel Townson writes that "the nationalist movement from the nineteenth century was carried out almost entirely through the medium of English" (1998: 75).

The use of Irish is thus an important feature of the rebel song. My sample, drawn from numerous published works, including the leading monograph on the subject (Ó Muirithe 1980), totals 96 rebel songs where Irish words are used. As the Irish language came more and more under threat, speaking even a few words became a political act. At the same time, Irish music became ever more important, and music-making per se became a

badge of nationalist aspirations. The reason why such songs exist and were sung is made clear by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969: 94): "Singing is the acoustic equivalent of wearing a mask: people can convey a message without bearing full responsibility". The connotations of this were well-understood by Ireland's national broadcasting organisation RTE, which, at the height of the Northern Ireland "Troubles" in 1972, banned all Irish folk music from the airwaves.

The subversive role of the macaronic is seen in the switching from one language to another with the intention of addressing, even momentarily, only part of the audience at a time.[3] Changing languages in this way is often an arena of struggle and contradiction. Code-switching as political resistance has a long history, most recently in the discourse of anti-imperialism: Chicana dramatists like Cherrié Moraga in Mexico and the Hispanic-speaking United States frequently use code-switching between Spanish and English as a kind of solidarity marker (eg. Jonsson 2005). This use of heterogeneous linguistic codes appearing within the same text, is one of the most distinctive features of the rebel song, a feature I have studied in two previous papers (Porter 2004; 2005). In one striking example from Gaelic-speaking Canada, itself a country where language hybridity is widespread, the Irish words add a rebellious gloss to a fawning English text*:*

> (3)   Come drink a health, boys, to royal George,
>   Our chief commander – nár ordaigh Chríost
>   Is aitchimis ar Mhuire Mháthair
>   É féi is a ghardaí a leagadh síos. (Coughlan 2001: 300)
>   [Come drink a health, boys, to royal George, our chief commander (whom Christ has not ordained: let us implore Mary, our Mother, to strike him down and his soldiers too)]

The exchange operates as much between performer and listener as within the dialectic of the text (see Porter 2004; 2005).

Here text and commentary act in truculent counterpoint, but the dominant form of macaronic rebel song is one where English predominates and Irish features in the form of stray lines or phrases – the so-called *cúpla focal* [couple of words]. There is both internal and external evidence that the intended audience of rebel songs was Irish people with a small but restricted knowledge of Gaelic. 86 songs out of the corpus of 96 (89%)

include only one or two words in Irish. These may be simply phatic expressions such as *ochone!* ("alas!"), but most are true macaronic songs in that the words have a grammatical function and therefore assume some command of both languages. The most frequently-used words are synonyms for Ireland, like *Erin, Eireann*, *Erin-go-Bragh* ["Ireland for ever"], *Grania* and *Granuaile*. A term like "Erin", a poetic version of Eire [Ireland] used in nearly half of all the rebel songs, or often occupies a central position in the song, such as a refrain or title, and has a connotative function as an indicator of the independent nation. For example, "A Stor mo Chroí" ("treasure of my heart") is a sentimental song of separation which seems to take up no position on the nationalist struggle. However, the single use of "Erin" unmistakably signifies what it calls the "stranger's land" of inequality and injustice (*Around* 2004: 33). It is an example of the "subtle but strong" function of code-switching identified by Ronald Wardhaugh (2006: 105), where a single word or 'tag' is introduced that encodes certain values. John Gumperz (1982: 72) suggested as early as 1982 that, rather than being grammatical, the motivation for code-switching might be metaphorical in this way. This is certainly true of examples where more than two languages feature in a song.

3 The poly-macaronic song

In Ireland, the third language is almost invariably French or Latin, forming what I have called a poly-macaronic song. In these, the connotations of these languages are very different from those of the Irish and from each other. Wardhaugh (2006: 103) writes that code choice may be "a form of political expression, a move either to resist some power, or to gain power, or to express solidarity," and this was the case with the French language at the end of the eighteenth century. French was less a signifier of culture at this time than of revolution: most immediately, it was spoken, and sung, by the forces that supported the 1798 rebellion in the south of the country. With the French songs, there was a different intertextual process at work: the role of French as a signifier of culture and civilization (as in Swedish loan words from this period, for example Stenfors 1994), was entirely superseded by the revolutionary discourse, in which France was the symbol of freedom. The most common expressions to appear are variants of the cry, "Vive la liberté!" (Zimmermann 2002: 160, 188). The French phrases are not integrated

syntactically in the same way as the Irish, but retain the status of quotations or allusions, and therefore may sit awkwardly in the text: "Viva la for gallant Parnell, viva la for all his band" (Zimmermann 2002: 62). This mixture of French and Spanish is a reference to the Scottish song, "Vive la! The French are coming", which also provided the melody for another song, found during a body search of the mother of a combatant killed in the 1798 uprising:

(4)   Vive la, United heroes,
        Triumphant may they always be;
        Vive la, our gallant brethren,
        That have come to set us free. (Zimmermann 2002: 160)

In performance today the first line of the song, "Rouse, Hibernians, from your slumbers!" links seamlessly with one English version of the Internationale of Eugène Pottier: "Arise, ye starvlings [sic] from your slumbers" (McDonnell 1986: 64).

4 Latin as intertext

Latin words in macaronic songs play a significantly different role from Irish and French. Songs featuring Latin lines or tags were relatively common in the Middle ages because of the power and prestige of the church. However, many examples of code-switching into Latin are secular, as in this anti-feminist carol (Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.1), from the fifteenth century:

(5)   Of all creatures women be best
        Cuius contrarium verum est.
        [Of which the contrary is the truth] (Davies 1963: 221 Editorial italics).

Here the Latin words of the chorus cancel the English, setting up a misogynistic subtext. Latin and English are placed in dialectical relation with one another, but it is the privileged language, Latin, not English, which bears the comic subtext. The reason for this is that, since women received no formal education at the time, very few knew Latin.

Other songs were a combination of the sacred and the secular, as in the "Boar's Head Carol", which celebrates both the feasting and the religious ritual of Christmas:

(6)   *Caput apri refero,*
       Resonens laudes Domino.
       The boris hed in hondes I brynge,
       With garlondes gay, and byrdes syngynge;
       [Once more I bring the boar's head,
       Singing praises to the Lord.
       I carry in the boar's head
       With sprays of flowers and singing birds] (Boklund-Lagopoulou 2002: 207. Editorial italics)

Unlike French, Latin had two main roles within the Irish language system, as a signifier of education and of religious ritual, the language of the Vulgate and the Catholic Mass. Thus the Irish words for architectural features, such as *fuinneog*, "window", and imported foods such as *ológ*, "olive", are often derived from Latin. In addition, Latin gave structure to formerly chaotic written discourse by making more general in Irish the use of the sentence, which had been defined by Aristotle as "utterances which have a beginning and an end of their own, and a length that can be seen as a whole" (1958: 84).

Latin is the intertext in "The Croppy Boy", one of the less well-known of the several songs that bear that name. It was written by W. B. McBurney, a member of the Young Irelanders, a nationalist movement associated with the periodical *The Nation* from the late 1830s. It was in this newspaper that "The Croppy Boy" was published on January 4th, 1845.[4] The song tells of a Croppy or rebel boy who arrives at a "great house" and asks for the priest so that he may make his confession. In the course of his confession he declares, "I love my country above my king", at which the supposed confessor reveals himself as an English yeoman captain in disguise:

(7)   Upon yon river three tenders float,
       The priest's in one – if he isn't shot –
       We hold this house for our lord the King,
       And, Amen say I, may all traitors swing. (Zimmermann 2002: 229.)

The boy is then led away to execution. The dramatic tension, and the political agenda, of "The Croppy Boy" lies in the way each of the four languages contests the status of the others. English, the "dominant" language in Myers-Scotton's model, is repeatedly challenged by three embedded and therefore "subordinate" languages. The mocking use of the Hebrew word *amen* by the captain here is in blasphemous counterpoint to the

boy's fervent use earlier of the words of the Catholic Mass in his confession. Those words, "Nomine Dei" and "Mea Culpa," are not integrated but proffered as isolated examples of the boy's speech, marked editorially in the published text by commas and quotation marks. The Irish expression, on the other hand, appears immediately on the entrance of the central figure, the Croppy boy:

> (8)   "Good men and true in this house who dwell,
>   To a stranger *bouchal* [Irish *buachaill* 'boy'] I pray you tell,
>   Is the priest at home, or may he be seen,
>   I would speak a word with Father Green." (Zimmermann 2002: 228. Original italics.)

The fact that, unlike the Latin and Hebrew intertexts, the Irish is fully integrated into both the syntactic structure and the narrative is significant. In the context of the historical moment in Ireland it was a political act that challenged the right of English to act as the sole voice of a colonised people.

5 Conclusion

This paper has confirmed Jonsson's findings with respect to the empowering role of code-switching. The very existence of the macaronic song denies the existence of any "language-centre". Since Irish was in competition for status within a colonial context, and its use circumscribed by law, the introduction of even a few Irish words into songs in English acted centrifugally, fracturing the authority of the dominant language and producing new and often enduring fusions, since many of these embedded phrases took on formulaic status and appeared in song after song. The changes that this involved often led, as in Chicana literature, to a hybrid genre in which the song occupies an interstitial space syntactically as well as lexically. Poly-macaronic songs of the kind studied in this paper are more complex because in such songs one of the languages is usually either literary or in some way ritualised, associated with political, religious or cultural codes that may transcend both social and ethnic boundaries. The social context of such songs makes it impossible to assume simple, unmediated relations between a speaker and their language (the monologic utterance). As we have seen, a quoted line of Latin or English might be simultaneously revered, copied and ridiculed. The songs offer

neither fanciful nor formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions, since, of course, only praxis could resolve them. Instead, the text itself becomes the arena for a struggle between meanings.

Notes

[1] Although it should be emphasised that the title of a song is often editorial, two versions of songs with this very well-known title are given in Colm O Lochlainn, ed., More Irish Street Ballads (London: Pan Books, 1978) 174–175, 246–247. The rebel broadside "Mrs O'Brien's Lament" (Anderson 2000: 393) has both "Erin-go-Bragh" and "Shamrock Shore."

[2] Zimmermann (2002: 94) estimates that 10% of Irish songs as a whole are rebel songs. Out of 239 macaronic songs that I have traced, 96 (or 40.2%) are rebel songs, a much higher proportion.

[3] Only one song offers a verse-by-verse translation, Elizabeth Cronin's version of "An bínsín luachra" (Bunch of Rushes), and even here she did not maintain the alternation of the verses but varied them (Dáibhí Ó Cróinin, ed. 2000. The Songs of Elizabeth Cronin. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 48–49).

[4] This should not be confused with the better-known song of the same name from the period of the 1798 uprising. "Croppy" refers to the hairstyle adopted by Irish nationalists at the time in supposed imitation of a fashion among French revolutionaries.

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The Irish Rover Lyrics: In the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and six / We set sail from the cold cove of Cork / We were sailing away with a cargo of bricks / For the grand City Hall in New York / She. Â To move an annotation to different lyrics in the song, use the [...] menu to switch to referent editing mode.Â skipper on the Irish Rover. We had one million bags of the best Sligo rags We had two million barrels of bone We had three million bales of old nanny goats' tails We had four million barrels of stone We had five million hogs and six million dogs And seven million barrels of porter We had eight million sides of old blind horse's hides In the hold. of the Irish Rover. Code-switching Penelope Gardner-Chloros Birkbeck College, University of London CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, SÃ£o Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo Cambridge University Press The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York www.cambridge.org Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521862646 Â©.Â At the same time, he reinforces his 3 Code-switching is sometimes found in the literature written as two separate words, sometimes with a hyphen and sometimes as one word. In spoken language, code-switching is using more than one language or dialect within the same conversation.[2]. Macaronic Latin in particular is a jumbled jargon made up of vernacular words given Latin endings, or of Latin words mixed with the vernacular in a pastiche (compare dog Latin). The word macaronic comes from the New Latin macaronicus which is from the Italian maccarone ("dumpling", regarded as coarse peasant fare).Â 1.1 Mixed Latin-vernacular lyrics in Medieval Europe. 1.2 Latinâ€“Italian macaronic verse. 1.3 Other mixed-language lyrics. Macaronic refers to text spoken or written using a mixture of languages, sometimes including bilingual puns, particularly when the languages are used in the same context (as opposed to different segments of a text being in different languages). The term is also sometimes used to denote hybrid...Â A rough equivalent in spoken language is code-switching, a term in linguistics referring to using more than one language or dialect in conversation. Macaronic Latin specifically is a jumbled jargon made up of vernacular words given Latin endings, or for Latin words mixed with the vernacular in a pastiche (compare dog Latin). The word macaronic comes from the New Latin macaronicus, from Italian dialect maccarone ("dumpling, macaroni", regarded as coarse peasant fare). Keywords: macaronic, Irish rebel song, code-switching, empowerment. 1 Code-switching and the macaronic song. Macaronic songs, a term used to designate lyrics performed in two or more languages, are a well-established feature of the oral literature of Ireland. In this paper I consider a special development of the macaronic song in Ireland, what I have called the poly-macaronic lyric, where more languages than two are featured. Each of these additional languages, in this case Latin and French, has a specific cultural function in an Irish context, and I suggest that they act interrogatively, furt...